Dream Syndicate at The Rat, Kenmore Square, February 19, 1983.

The vibes coming from California say that hardcore is becoming passe. It is no longer an underground movement; every teenager living west of Reno and south of Olympia seems to have bought some boots and chains, joined a HC band, and put out a 45 (A-side: “I Hate Cops,” B-side: “No More Government”). Now the search is on for a replacement, that’s where the psychedelic revival comes in.

Dream Syndicate released a four-song EP about a year ago, and “That’s What You Always Say” made them famous. It was a good psychedelic girl-song, and had a long guitar break featuring tons of feedback. Their LP was released last fall, and had a very different sound: some songs could have passed for Rolling Stones covers, and the lo-o-o-o guitar breaks of the first EP had been condensed or eliminated in most songs. In all, they seemed to have gone for a pop sound.

I liked Dream Syndicate’s live show, but not for the reason I had expected. I figured they’d be a good pop dance band that would play cute songs like those on the LP. What I saw instead was a show that was even more psychedelic than their EP. In a one-hour set, they played about seven songs, each with more fuzz and feedback than the last. The Rat recently installed an amazing stage lighting system, and this was the first time I have seen it used to its potential. The crowd was hypnotized. Few danced, but everyone stared.

Dream Syndicate

A bunch of bands have popped up on the West Coast lately with a new old idea: music built on the strong roots of '60s psychedelic rock. There are two main lineages: pop bands (like the Byrds) and garage punk bands (like the Thirteenth Floor Elevators and The Sonics). The origins of these two types of psychedelic rock are similar. The first is the result of serious musicians eating LSD; the second is the result of suburban teenagers eating LSD.

The Pebbles series of reissued garage punk records and the Nuggets reissue helped to call attention to this stuff in the late '70s in Boston, they inspired the Neats and IOMZ (now called the Lyres). In L.A., they inspired the Dream Syndicate and Salvation Army (now renamed the Three O’Clock), among others. The difference between the east and west is that in California the idea caught on in a major way, and now there are a million of these outfits popping up.

Dream Syndicate released a four-song EP about a year ago, and “That’s What You Always Say” made them famous. It was a good psychedelic girl-song, and had a long guitar break featuring tons of feedback. Their LP was released last fall, and had a very different sound: some songs could have passed for Rolling Stones covers, and the lo-o-o-o guitar breaks of the first EP had been condensed or eliminated in most songs. In all, they seemed to have gone for a pop sound.

Steve Wynn (vocals/rhythm ax), who seems to be the main force behind the band, tried to increase his rapport with the audience, but should have kept his mouth closed and let his music do the talking. The music is far more eloquent. He insisted on explaining how the band “wants to be loved” and prompting the crowd to applaud. Although his vocals benefit from studio production, live, they seem weak and whiny.

Karl Precoda (lead ax) is a spindly, scraggly hippie with long hair and dilated pupils. He seemed to enjoy jumping (gingerly) off every speaker cabinet and riser he could find. Dennis Duck (drums) looked like he had just surfed in for the gig. He must be one of the least imaginative drummers ever, content to beat quarter notes on his snare drum with both hands with minimal variation. Kendra Smith (bass ax) was an oasis of cool, bobbing and swaying around the stage, at times oblivious to the audience.

An hour of continuous staring gave plenty of time for examining the band. Steve Wynn (vocals/lead ax), who seems to be the main force behind the band, tried to increase his rap with the audience, but should have kept his mouth closed and let his music do the talking. The music is far more eloquent. He insisted on explaining how the band “wants to be loved” and prompting the crowd to applaud. Although his vocals benefit from studio production, live, they seem weak and whiny.

Karl Precoda (lead ax) is a spindly, scraggly hippie with long hair and dilated pupils, and some strange ideas on stage presence. He seemed to enjoy jumping (gingerly) off every speaker cabinet and riser he could find. Dennis Duck (drums) looked like he had just surfed in for the gig. He must be one of the least imaginative drummers ever, content to beat quarter notes on his snare drum with both hands with minimal variation. Kendra Smith (bass ax) was an oasis of cool, bobbing and swaying around the stage, at times oblivious to the audience.

Jon von Zelowitz